

Life With God In Recovery

STEP FOUR: SOFT ADDICTIONS



Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV)

Soft addictions can be habits or compulsive behaviors that seek to alter recurring moods or thought patterns. Their essential defining quality is that they satisfy a surface want but ignore or block a deeper need. They numb us to unfamiliar or uncomfortable feelings. They substitute a superficial high for genuine feelings of accomplishments. Rather than leaning on these temporary supports, God wants us to acknowledge truth in our places of need. He wants to strengthen us and help us and hold us steady with His righteous right hand.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10 NIV)

Many soft addictions involve necessary behaviors like eating and sleeping. They become soft addictions when we overdo them and when they are used for more than their intended purpose. Soft addictions, unlike hard ones such as drugs and alcohol, are seductive because they seem perfectly harmless and pleasurable while we're engaged in them. These activities may include reading, watching TV, spending time on the internet, talking on the phone, texting, shopping, physical exercise, eating or gaming. We often don't realize how much time and energy we give to these types of addictions and how they compromise the quality of our lives. Jesus came to give us life to the full and when these seemingly harmless things are used in excess, they rob us of our daily experience of that fullness. The Bible teaches us to check everything we do against the underlying motive for our actions. ***So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*** (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV)

Are we engaging in a particular activity to enhance our life and our relationships or are we simply trying to numb our feelings and let the world go by? Are we seeking to engage with life or to escape from life? Are we conscious of God's presence in us and around us as we participate in the activity or, are we seeking satisfaction in it, rather than from living in the way of truth? Do we believe we are serving God's purposes with what we are doing or are we substituting this activity for comfort and distraction from feelings of discontent, loneliness or anger? These are issues we need to consider as we determine whether or not the action is a healthy activity or a soft addiction.

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2 NLT)

The following are some clues to help us recognize if our behaviour or mood is connected to a soft addiction:

Avoiding feelings Does a given activity grant us a reprieve from our emotions, especially intense emotions? Four ways we can assess this are: 1) We are trying to numb our feelings by avoiding them. 2) We seek to enhance the feelings we like to the exclusion of others that challenge us. 3) We choose to wallow in one unpleasant feeling to avoid dealing with another. 4) We think and talk about negative and painful things repeatedly and choose to live in that familiar emotional state rather than allowing God to take us forward into something new and life giving.

Compulsiveness Do we feel compelled to do something, have something, or buy something, even though we know the action will have a negative impact on our health or on our financial situation? Some indicators are: 1) Although we may find some temporary pleasure in the activity, we often don't feel good about ourselves after engaging in it. 2) We are unable to control the amount of time we spend on a given activity. 3) The behaviour may be accompanied by a helpless, powerless feeling. 4) We persist in following the routine of "doing" and then saying to ourselves, "I will never do that again," only to find ourselves "doing it again."

Denial/Rationalization If we're defensive or make excuses for our behavior or mood, chances are it's a soft addiction. Typical responses to our conscience or a challenge by others are: 1) "What's so bad about watching TV, spending time on the internet, reading, having a second helping of food?" 2) "You don't know what I'm going through." 3) "I have a right to do this or feel this way because" The impulse to deny or rationalize excess in an area of behaviour suggests a soft addiction.

Hiding the behavior Are there some habits that are shameful pleasures we seek to hide? Covering up the amount of time we spend on an activity or lying to others about how we spend our time or our money are signs of soft addictions.

The problem with soft addictions is that they become deeply ingrained in our way of coping with life. By submitting to this way of life we reach the point of being out of touch with who we truly are. We fail to allow God to touch and heal us and meet our deeper needs. We move farther from God's purpose for our life and from the satisfaction of living from our full potential. We find ourselves asking: "Is this all there is?" God offers

something better but it requires that we turn from our self-induced way of life and follow the way of God.

The Bible makes this point: ***Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.*** (Romans 6:16 NLT)

In our searching and fearless moral inventory, we have to be radically honest about the underlying root of our behaviours – all of them – not just those that are easily labeled "addictions and dependencies". We need to seek the truth before God about the unmet longings or underlying pain behind the soft addiction. When the root is revealed, we need to confess it before God and receive the peace and blessing that God gives.

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11b-13 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What thoughts or behaviours signal to me that I might have an area of soft addiction in my life?
2. Do I recognize avoidance of my intense feelings when I turn to a particular soft addiction? What feelings do I tend to want to avoid?
3. Do I feel compelled to do something, have something, or buy something, even though I know the action will have a negative impact on my health or on my financial situation?
4. Do I get defensive when someone challenges me about a particular pattern of behaviour?
5. In order that I live in God's plan for fullness of life for me, what changes do I need to make in the area of soft addictions?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you for your unfailing love for me. Thank you for pursuing me with your love and exposing those things that hinder my relationship with you. I ask you now Father to mend those broken places that cause me pain. Help me to break the ties of any dysfunctional way I have used the good things you have provided for me. I desire to grow in my knowledge of you and to walk in your ways. Heal me. Make me new. Thank you that you will never leave or forsake me. I am eternally grateful that you care. AMEN